

GMLRS Unitary in the Close Fight

In April 2006, I received a phone call from my previous artillery brigade S3 from Iraq who is now the 2-4 FA [2nd Battalion, 4th Field Artillery] (MLRS) [multiple-launch rocket system] commander, Lieutenant Colonel Adam Legg, [214th Fires Brigade] at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. During his tenure as S3 for the 41st FA Brigade, I was the HHB [headquarters and headquarters battery] commander. I am now a BCT FSCoord [brigade combat team fire support coordinator] for one of the Army's newest transformed infantry BCTs, the 2nd IBCT, 2nd Infantry Division, from Fort Carson, Colorado, currently deployed in support of OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom], again. While we were training to deploy, LTC Legg offered to provide a dedicated MLRS platoon to support our upcoming NTC [National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California] rotation scheduled for July 2006.

He explained the accuracy of the new guided-MLRS, or GMLRS, unitary munition and asked if I could sell the BCT commander, Colonel Jeffrey Bannister, on bringing the additional assets to the NTC.

As soon as the word "MLRS" was mentioned in the BCT headquarters, it was met with a lot of chuckles, especially from those on the staff who recently returned from Special Operations Forces assignments. It was followed by comments like, "You mean that thing with all those cluster bombs that can take out an entire grid square...you think we can really use that at in Iraq or even at the NTC?"

I knew my work was cut out for me. But after finding some videos on the Fires Knowledge Network (FKN) on the Army Knowledge Online (AKO) website, I thought this MLRS plan could be approved. After re-working the NTC 220-day letter of intent to include LTC Legg's unit from Fort Sill and receiving COL Bannister's approval, we were on our way.

To ensure the AFATDS [advanced FA tactical data system] software would work correctly, we invited two launchers from C/2-4 FA (MLRS) to participate in the BCTs pre-NTC mission rehearsal



Soldiers look over the results of a test of the guided multiple-launch rocket system (GMLRS) unitary on a building in Iraq in June 2005.

exercise at Fort Carson in May 2006. The visibility of the launchers and their integration into the BCTs counterfire drills helped to ensure more members of the BCT were aware of the GMLRS unitary's capabilities—that it is extremely timely and accurate.

At the NTC, the platoon of launchers gave an exceptional performance. The brigade used them routinely for counterfire on locations outside of the range of 120-mm mortars and 105-mm artillery. Surprisingly, they were the weapon of choice for one infantry battalion commander on two of his raids as a means of effective fires with reduced collateral damage. The question started coming up at every rehearsal, "What kind of launcher support will we receive?"

LTC Legg and I would've been satisfied if the platoon had fired five rockets during the entire two-week period, but the platoon received so many requests that it fired well over 50 rockets and twice had to relocate to support units because the rocket requests were inside the munition's minimum range.

The entire purpose behind the integration of C/2-4 FA into our NTC rotation was to educate maneuver forces on today's GMLRS unitary capabilities. Not only did the maneuver leadership (and artillery leadership, for that matter) learn of a new, reliable and extremely accurate weapon system (no more chuckles by

the way), but also the entire NTC staff became more aware of the GMLRS unitary's capabilities. Eight days into "the box" portion of the rotation and the NTC leadership was still learning about (and believing) the capabilities of the GMLRS unitary munition.

The more people I talk with about the GMLRS unitary, the more I realize that the word is just not getting out to both maneuver and artillery personnel throughout the force. If you are still one of the hardliners out there who has yet to educate yourself and spread the word to your maneuver brethren about GMLRS unitary (be ready for a snicker when you mention it as a viable weapon for the close fight), then educate yourself, become a believer, and spread the word. To start your education, see the article "FA PGMs—Revolutionizing Fires for the Ground Force Commander" by Colonels Gary S. Kinne, John A. Tanzi and Jeffrey W. Yaeger in the May-June 2006 edition. It is online at sill-www.army.mil/famag/index.asp. Then view the FKN video.

After you've seen GMLRS in action, then it is easy to believe. The Chief of FA says the Marines have dubbed it their "70-kilometer sniper" and are using it as the weapon of choice.

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